

Essay Planning

A step by step guide.

Step 1: Key words and what exactly do they mean?

Think about the major words in the essay question and what they mean. Which definition is relevant to the text? Write some alternatives you can then use in your essay. Rewrite the essay question (this is often a good way to start an essay).

Step 2: What are the key concepts/ themes you need to consider?

What are the major themes in the text that you need to consider to answer the essay question? Often they are mentioned in the question but sometimes they aren't, so look closely.

Step 3: What do I think & know about these concepts/ themes?

Here's the part where you need to start thinking of all the events, plot twists, character development, narrator comments, and other parts of the text that relate to our themes from the question. Write all your ideas out in shorthand so you don't forget anything. You can use either:

Concept mapping or brainstorming: this is a more visual form that concentrates on the relationship between the ideas.

Interrogation: this is for the more logically inclined person or themes. You ask questions like- what happened? When? Who is involved? How do they feel about it? What is the result? Etc. so that you come up with lots of ideas that you can use.

Step 4: How can I support what I think?

Write out reminders for all those wonderful relevant quotes you've memorised and other material that you can use as evidence to support your contention (what you're trying to say in the essay!)

Step 5: How can I best arrange this material?

Group your ideas together according to what you would include in each paragraph. Is there anything that isn't very strong, you don't have much evidence for or just doesn't fit in with the rest? If yes, scrap it and use the rest. Arrange these into the order that will flow the best and convince your reader the most. This could be chronological, cycling through the characters or according to strength of argument. This is your traditional 'essay plan.'

Step 6: Introduction and conclusion

Introduction: Remember to restate your essay question, mention the broad themes and concepts to be discussed. Follow this by introducing your paragraphs and your contention (point of view). Don't go into heaps of detail but make sure that your reader knows where you're headed with this essay.

Conclusion: Remind your reader of the essay question of issue. Remind them of all the great points that you have made in your essay. Don't introduce NEW evidence or points but definitely take a chance to strengthen the most important points by mentioning them again (and in a slightly different way). Finish very strongly. State your contention and basically let your reader know that you're right and it's a great point. Be sure and clear!